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ABSTRACT

The value of field experience in administrator preparation programs is assessed in this paper, which examines commonly held beliefs about field experience. The following values of field experience--that it assesses career commitment, refines school goals, provides practice in real settings, and develops personal and professional competence--are disputed. Commonly held assumptions are also examined, which view field-based programs as examples of clinical experience, as natural complements to university courses, as part of a finite activity, as valuable in administrator preparation, and as the cure for administrator training. A three-dimensional model based on academic preparation, field-based learning, and professional formation is suggested. Professional formation is a process that synthesizes learning sources and provides a link between theory and practice. The recommendation is made for adding a professional formation component to field-based practice. (20 references) (LMI)

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# ARE "FIELD-BASED" PROGRAMS THE ANSWER TO THE REFORM OF ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS?

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# ARE "FIELD-BASED" PROGRAMS THE ANSWER TO THE REFORM OF ADMINISTRATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS?

Recent proposals for change and reform of education have tended to focus primarily on suggesting new ways for educational personnel to be prepared for their jobs. Recommendations related to the improvement of teacher and administrator preservice preparation have featured many of the same themes. One of these found in both the Holmes Report (1986) on reform in teacher education and the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration (1987), for example, was that more emphasis needs to be placed on the articulation of a strong, research-based body of knowledge to serve as a foundation for all educational programs. Second, there has been an increasing expectation that educators be prepared for their future roles in classrooms and administrative offices by having more opportunities to receive "field-based" preservice training. The very clear assumption in this expectation is that the more people are able to "learn by doing" before taking on a full-time job, the more successful they will be. In short, "field-based" preparation programs have been pointed to as an important way in which existing practices might be reformed. It is the purpose of this paper to review the nature of the overriding assumption of the value of field experience, and also the specific beliefs about what field programs might do. In this, I hope to provide a more accurate analysis of the true potential for reform found in many current, popular proposals.

## Current Status of Field-Based Programs

In general, the emphasis on field-based programs assumes that such activities will serve as a way to bridge the gap that is often said to exist between administrative theories as they are presented in traditional university courses and practice that is found in the

everyday "real world" work of schools. The belief that such activities have great value as part of the preservice preparation of school administrators is gaining strength and support. State departments of education across the United States have increasingly endorsed the need for would-be administrators to learn more about their future duties by spending time involved with practica. In the past 15 years, the number of states requiring some form of internships or planned field experience as a part of initial certification standards for administrators has increased from 10 to 25 (Gousha, LoPresti, and Jones, 1986). It is clear that the preparation of school administrators is moving rather quickly toward increased reliance on field-based training activities.

In large measure, a considerable amount of the energies of the UCEA Center on Field Relations in Educational Administration Training Programs, a Program Center Co-Hosted by The Ohio State University and the University of Cincinnati (Daresh, 1988), have been devoted to the documentation and tracing of the ways in which field-based programs have been used to enhance the quality of preservice administrator preparation programs in universities across the United States and Canada. Despite the movement toward more field-based programs, however, it is appropriate to step back from the mainstream to consider the extent to which the assumptions and beliefs typically utilized to support and justify such programs appear to be valid and make sense.

## Rationale for the Field-Based Practicum

It is somewhat surprising to note that, while there are numerous recommendations suggesting the need to improve the quality and frequency of field-based administrator preparation activities, the literature concerning this aspect of educational administration programs is presently not well-developed. The majority of recent descriptions of the field-based practicum in educational administration training have had their conceptual grounding in the area of teacher education (Daresh, Forthcoming). The existing literature has left virtually no

specific direction for assisting those who are interested in increasing their understanding of practica utilized for the training of educational leaders.

Due to the fact that there has been a fairly rich literature base in the field of preservice teacher education, however, there does exist some descriptions of the desirable practices and underlying assumptions that are in place for the use of field-based practica in professional education. Turney (1973) provided the following succinct statement of the rationale for making use of practica in preparing educational personnel:

> Ideally conceived the practicum is a powerful series of professional experiences in which student teachers apply, refine, and reconstruct theoretical learning, and through which they develop their training competence. The practicum is an integral part of the programme of teacher education contributing to the achievement of its aims and closely related to its content competence.

This statement is directed primarily toward the world of initial training for classroom teachers, and it may be criticized as being inappropriate for school administrators. The emphasis, for example, on the use of student teaching as a way to help people to "refine their teaching competence" is hardly comparable to the problem of finding a place for prospective administrators "to refine their administrative skills" which are in no way similar to the discrete, observable tasks involved with teaching. Nevertheless, it appears that this rationale has some conceptual power and value to future school leaders and their preservice training involving the use of field-based practica. It seems to make "good sense" that an effective way to enable people to understand the linkage between theory learned in universities and practice in the "real world" of schools is to expect that future school executives would spend some time working in a school, at least on a part-time basis, before going out into the world of administration for the first time.

The description offered by Turney is also helpful because it

provides a good framework that specifies quite clearly the expectations of a practicum utilized in the preparation of school personnel. Among the suggested values to be derived from a field-based program are the following:

1. [The practicum enables individuals] to test their commitment to...a career...;
2. ...to gain insight into the preparation of a...school, [its] goals, and how they may be achieved;
3. ...to apply knowledge and skills gained through college studies in a practical setting;
4. ...to progressively develop...competencies through participation in a range of practical experiences;
5. ...to evaluate progress and identify areas where further [personal and professional] development is needed.

Assessing Career Commitment

The belief that a practicum is a way to help people test their commitment to a field is commendable, but also an unlikely outcome. The fact is that, for the most part, planned field experiences and other forms of practica are required activities for students of educational administration near the end of their academic programs. As a result, there is little likelihood that such programs will guide someone in making a career choice. After an individual has invested time, money, and other resources in an educational program to the point where that program is nearly finished, it is unlikely that the person will suddenly change his or her mind about wanting to be an administrator after spending a few weeks "out in the field." There is a major contradiction found in the suggestion that a field-based learning experience can test one's commitment to a career if the commitment has already been forced to some degree.

In addition to this restriction on field-based programs serving to guide career commitment, the fact is that career guidance requires a deep and serious commitment by people who are willing to work on a continuous basis with aspiring administrators. Unfortunately, the

dominant theme in most existing university programs is one of "getting people through courses" as a way of finding the fastest and most effective route to the goal of an administrative position. Energy is directed toward getting people through programs, not at the needs and interests of the individuals in the programs.

Refining School Goals

Another value said to be derived from field-based programs suggests that when people participate in these activities, they have the potential to work in a school to help refine the goals of that school. The majority of current field-based programs are limited in their ability to have much of an impact on real issues in schools as organizations, including the nature of the goals of the school. Field-based training programs are all too frequently treated as opportunities for individuals to "play at" being administrators rather than engaging in real leadership situations. Goals and practices remain as they were prior to the intervention by an administrative intern or any other "outsider;" this occurs as the result of convention rather than by the fault of the intern. The message is clearly sent in most situations that "Interns should be seen and not heard."

Practicing in Realistic Settings

Another prevailing view is that field-based programs provide people a way to learn about their future work in realistic settings. In practice, the notion of allowing people to "learn by doing" as administrators is frequently reduced to a less than satisfying experience. Practicing administrative and leadership skills in a realistic setting often means providing full-time classroom teachers to take a few minutes during the school day to "play at" being school administrators by doing such things as making telephone calls to the homes of truant students, supervising school bus loadings and unloadings, and monitoring the lunch room. The problem with such experiences is not that they do not consist of some of the things that real, live school administrators do on their jobs; principals do make phone calls, stand in front of the building when the buses roll in, wander through the cafeteria, and dozens of other similar tasks

that, while appearing trivial on the surface, are part of the business of keeping a school going and setting a tone.

The problem with using such tasks as the basis for an administrative practicum, however, is that they simply represent a very limited and fragmented view of what administration is all about, or what it could be. It would be similar to student teachers watching a teacher doing nothing but disciplining students or doing hall duty, then believing that what was seen was "teaching." The aspiring administrator who learns about the principal's role by only checking out the rest rooms or by filling out forms that the central office wants but the principal does not wish to complete does not see the total life of a school principal. The essence of school administration may be defined as the process of making decisions "that count." An aspiring administrator engaged in a field-based learning program may not be able to make such decisions.

Developing Competence

The suggestion here is that, unless a person gains practical experiences before employment, he or she will be incompetent on the job. A brief review of the field will show this belief to be false. There are some talented administrators who never engaged in a preservice field experience. There are also terrible administrators who participated in sophisticated preservice internships. Simply assuming that one learns by doing practical things is wrong.

Promoting Personal Professional Development

Without a strong reflective component that demands that students review personal goals and objectives as they are related to field-based activities, mere participation in a practicum will not have much impact on a person's individual growth and formation as a future school leader. The field experience will likely never be much more than another hurdle for people to go through "on the way to" gaining a license to administer.

## Inherent Assumptions in Field-Based Programs

In addition to the values that people believe are naturally part of field-based programs, there are some basic assumptions that appear to be implied as inherent characteristics of such activities. As I review much of the existing literature on field-based programs (Daresh, 1987), I detect the following notions in much of what has been said and written:

1. Field-based programs are examples of clinical learning.
2. Field-based programs are natural complements to university courses.
3. Preservice administrator preparation is a bounded and finite activity, and field-based programs are part of that activity.
4. There is a demonstrable value in the use of field-based learning activities for preparing administrators.
5. The addition of field-based programs will be the cure that will improve administrator preparation.

Each of these assumptions deserves to be reviewed in greater detail before one accepts them at face value.

### Field-Based Programs are Examples of Clinical Learning

The reform literature has typically used the terms "field-based" and "clinical" as virtually interchangeable concepts. In fact, there is a strong tendency to include "experiential learning" as a synonym for these terms as well. While it is true that there is some overlap among these terms, and that they are all related, there are some critical differences that need to be understood if we are to discuss potential changes in the format used to prepare educational leaders.

Gary Griffin (1986) reviewed existing research and other literature related to the concept of clinical approaches to teacher education and identified seven critical features that need to be present "whether the program is at preservice, induction, or inservice levels of implementation" (p. 7). In order for a program to be truly a "clinical" experience, it must be embedded in a school context and

be: (1) context sensitive, (2) purposeful and articulated, (3) participatory and collaborative, (4) knowledge-based, (5) ongoing, (6) developmental, and (7) analytic and reflective. Most current suggestions for improving administrator preparation suggest that clinical programs are but "imbedded in a school context." Griffin's conceptualization suggests that there is considerably more in clinical education than merely putting people out in schools for part of their preservice education. While each of the seven components identified above might be explored in greater detail, the point at which I will leave the present discussion is simply by noting that all of the issues raised in Griffin's description suggest that there is a continuing relationship fostered between the learner and individuals either in the local school or at the university who will work consistently with the student to make sense out of the learning in the field.

What we frequently see in response to the suggestion that programs need more of a clinical dimension is a simplistic attempt to put people into the field more often or earlier in their preservice program, without further guidance from either the university or the local educational agency to which the student is sent. If this is what passes for field-based and clinical learning, we are missing the point.

There is also a tendency to define field-based programs as experiential activities. Once again, it is true that there are overlaps between learning in the field and learning through experience, but simply sending people to field settings is not experiential learning. Bandura (1977), Checkering (1977), Little (1983) and other have generally defined experiential learning as a process where individuals are able to reflect on the implications of what they have witnessed in the field as a way to engage in personal construction of meaningful learning. Experiential learning is a process, not simply the placement of individuals in a setting where they can experience different realistic activities related to their future career goals. This observation, recently popularized in much of the recent literature on experiential learning, is found in the works of John Dewey

(1938) who also noted that learning through experience alone is seldom learning. There must be a dimension of personal reflectivity included. The current reform proposals rarely talk about field-based learning opportunities in ways that include much more than the ability for students to administration to learn by doing "administrative tasks" in schools. Reflection is rarely included as a component.

**Field-Based Programs are Natural Complements to University Programs**

There is an interesting implied assumption in most of the calls for more field-based administrator preparation that these activities will "fit" very naturally with the existing educational activities and priorities of university-based preparation programs. To believe this would ignore existing conditions in many settings. University faculties typically do not trust their colleagues in the field, and practitioners in the field have little respect for what newcomers to administration have learned in university courses. While it is rarely admitted, a pervasive view in many universities is that students of administration need a strong base in university coursework and theory before they go out into the field where they will never hear of such great ideas again. On the other hand, practicing administrators who work with beginning colleagues are rarely bashful about expressing their doubts about the usefulness of what people have learned about the realities of school administration in university lecture halls. The level of trust existing between universities and the field is not high enough to permit thinking about natural complementarity of preparation efforts. Each side spends a good part of its time making sure that the aspiring administrator survives the other "partner."

Until steps are taken to make certain that university faculties work with colleagues in the field as true partners to the preparation process, there will never be much truth in the view that field-based programs are complements to university-based programs. At present, the training often works as a system of checks and balances rather than a cooperative and collaborative partnership.

**Administrator Preparation is a Bounded and Finite Activity**

The myth exists somehow that first, someone such as the university or the field prepares a person to be an administrator and second, that there is a completion point in the preparation of administrators (or in fact, any professional educator). Recent analyses of the work of administrators (Pitner, 1982; Peterson, 1986; Achilles, 1987) have suggested that the realities of administrative life are such that no one can ever be totally "prepared" to be a principal, superintendent, or any other type of educational leader as a finished product. The best that can occur during a preservice preparation program is that a person will be provided with the basic skills, attitudes, and values needed to learn throughout a professional career.

The problem with much of the recent discussion concerning the improvement of administrator preparation, either through the use of field-based programs or in any other sense, is the fact that there is a strong implication that the administration of schools will somehow be magically improved if people are prepared differently. There must be an accompanying realization that preservice programs are merely the beginning points of preparation to be effective leaders. The science and art of effective school administration is something that cannot be learned through a dozen or so university courses coupled with a number of weeks in a school as an intern. Learning as an administrator must continue long after initial certification by a state education agency. With that in mind, the discussions concerning "field-based" v. "university-based" deal with only a small part of the issue concerning the improvement of school administration.

## There is a Demonstrable Value in the Use of Field-Based Programs

The basic assumption in all discussions concerning field-based learning activities is that these activities will have a positive impact on the ways in which people are prepared to assume professional roles. There is a need to question whether or not this practice, while seemingly a sound one based on logic, really does make a difference in the effectiveness of a practicing school administrator. It is so well-grounded as an assumption that people will learn better if they learn by doing that few have really examined the long-term

benefits of a person serving a time in a field-based preparation program. In a recent review of the status of research on the internship and field experience in administrative preparation programs, Daresh (1987) found that the impact of such programs on administrator effectiveness has not been studied with any consistency. Instead, research on internships has tended to be limited to the analysis of such things as whether a particular local program "worked"--typically defined as whether or not participants in the program said that they enjoyed the activities. We simply do not as yet have a sufficient data base concerning the long-term benefits of field-based administrative preparation programs to allow us to say with any degree of certainty that such activities will build better leaders. Two possible explanations come to mind. The first is that the research questions along these lines have not been asked to date. The second more basic issue is probably found in the fact that we do not truly have a clear picture in our minds of what an "effective" administrator should be. This leads to a situation where we assume that field-based programs are probably helpful, but we do not know toward what end they should help. What is a good administrator?

Despite the persistent emphasis on the need for field-based activities to be used to enhance the quality of administrator preparation programs, there has been a lack of systematic study of this issue. In addition, going back to Dewey (1938) and persisting to the present day with observations by Berliner (1984), Cruickshank and Armaline (1986), and Zeichner (1986), there have been numerous cautions about the possibility that field-based learning experiences may be actually viewed as "miseducative," and that they create cognitive and behavioral traps which close avenues to conceptual and social changes that may be warranted (Daresh & Pape, 1987). In short, before we go too far in our suggestions that there would be wholesale adoption of field-based learning activities, there needs to be a careful examination of the true benefits to be derived from such approaches

**Field-Based Programs Will Cure Problems of Administrator Preparation**

Despite some of the limitations on the beliefs and assumptions regarding the power of field-based programs that have been noted here, there are no doubt many values to be gained through the thoughtful addition of opportunities for students of administration to spend time in the field while they are participating in preservice preparation programs. I have great reservations about the extent to which these types of increased field-based programs will in themselves provide solutions to what has been identified as some of the major shortcomings of existing administrator preparation programs. To begin with, some of what ails administration of schools today has little to do with preparation activities in themselves. Instead, there are problems with initial recruitment and selection of people to go into school leadership in the first place. Such concerns, however, go beyond the focus of this paper. What can be said, however, is that we must have talented people going into administration in the first place if we expect to have any hope of preparing high quality leaders for the future.

Even more relevant to our current discussion regarding limitations on the value of field-based programs is the fact that there is much more that needs to be incorporated in an effective preparation program beyond the theory of university courses and the practice of field-based learning activities. Studies of first year administrators (Daresh, 1986; Weindling & Earley, 1987) have shown that among the greatest problems of induction for beginning principals is the fact that there is little understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses related to the vision of effective administration. People are reasonably well-prepared to handle the technical demands of administration; what is missing are personalized understandings of the field of administration. Merely adding more opportunities for field-based activities will not necessarily address this type of concern.

## A Suggested Strategy for Improvement

Rather than continuing to spend time discussing the need to add

more field-based learning, or reducing the amount of time students of school administration spend in university classes, as if to say that there is an "either-or" optimal balance that might be achieved between these two activities, I would suggest that what we need to improve the nature of administrator preparation is to think of an entirely different dimension that has traditionally not been included. In fact, one might argue that, because excellent educational leaders continue to be produced by much of what is currently taking place, a lot of today's practices "ain't broke," so "there's no need to fix them." Any proposal for change regarding the preservice preparation of school administrators must be sensitive to the likelihood that some of what is now taking place is good, but also that it could all be much better with some modifications or additions. I propose that we begin to think in terms of a "Tri-Dimensional Model" that may be used in the preparation of administrators. The three dimensions included in this model are Academic Preparation, Field-Based Learning, and Professional Formation. People must be prepared for leadership roles through equal attention to strong academic programs, realistic guided practice, and perhaps most importantly, through the formation of individual candidates as aspiring administrators who need to be able to cope personally and professionally with the ambiguities associated with the responsibilities of school leadership.

The dimensions of Academic Preparation and Field-Based Learning are fairly easy to understand and have served as the focus of the discussion throughout the earlier part of this paper. Professional Formation, however, is a new concept and refers to those activities consciously directed toward assisting the aspiring administrator to synthesize learnings acquired through the other sources, and also develop a personalized appreciation of what it means to be an educational leader. At least five specific elements may be viewed as components of Professional Formation. These include preservice mentoring relationships, personal reflection, personal philosophy and platform development, appreciation of alternative interpersonal and learning styles, and formal personal professional development. Any

comprehensive approach to the improvement of administrator preparation needs to take into account activities such as these in addition to high quality university courses and relevant field-based learning. In a sense, the Professional Formation serves as the bridge or link between the theory and practice dimensions of administrator preparation.

## Summary and Conclusion

In this paper, some of the most widely-held beliefs and assumptions related to the use of field-based programs to prepare educational administrators were revieved. It has long been assumed that a way to improve schools is to improve the ways in which educational personnel are prepared. Further, preservice preparation programs are supposed to be improved with the addition of more opportunities for practical, field-based learning activities.

While there is no doubt that some improvement can and likely will occur when future administrators are provided with the opportunity to practice their craft before taking a first full-time job, the primary goal of this paper was to caution that simply adding more opportunities for people to engage in field-based practica is not enough. The most important concept that needs to be added to programs for the preservice preparation of school administrators is a period of Professional Formation wherein administrative candidates put together learning acquired in the field and in the classroom and also their own values and priorities to form more wholistic and personal understandings of educational leadership. Without this type of "glue" that links theory and practical application, the preparation of school administrators will continue to be characterized by fragmented approaches, and the reformers will continue to demand that "we need more..," whether the "more" is theory, practice, or many other isolated ingredients.

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